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XXXI
All-India Oriental Conference
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WELCOME ADDRESS

By

Prof. T. K. N. UNNITHAN

Vice-Chancellor

University of Rajasthan

&

Patron, Local Committee & Reception Committee

Padma Shri Rama Kant Shukla Collection at Deva Vani Parishad, Uttam Nagar New Delhi

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Your Excellency, Distinguished Delegates to the Conference, Ladies and Gentlemen :

It gives me great pleasure indeed to extend a most hearty welcome to the delegates and office-bearers of the 31st All-India Oriental Conference, on behalf both of the University of Rajasthan and of my own. The university deems it a privilege to be the host institution for such a distinguished gathering of Orientalogists and Indologists, a select group of dedicated scholars, who may truly be regarded as the custodians of all that is best in the four–thousand–year–old heritage of this great land of ours. I would like to offer our respectful salutations to the Acharyas, Pandits, Shastris, Vidvans and others whose presence and participation in this conference will inspire us all.

The State of Rajasthan, as well as the city of Jaipur, have been known for their hospitality and patronage to scholarship and fine arts and even more to vibrant ideas from all over the country. In this respect our local tradition has made significant contributions to the preservation and furtherance of the ancient cultural and scientific heritage of this hoary land of sages and seers. It has been inspired by no narrow chauvinism; on the contrary, its main motivating force has been the noble desire to preserve and perpetuate what by common consent represents one of the finest endeavours of the human spirit to seek both material and spiritual perfection.

The above point is worth making because too often a distorted version of ancient Indian thought and life is presented either out of ignorance or of malice. Nothing can be more wide of the mark than to suggest that ancient India was exclusively

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given to unrelieved asceticism and other-worldliness to the total neglect of matters of this world in the here and now. I can do no better than quote at some length one of the best and most discerning foreign writers on India, Professor A. L. Basham, who, talking of the glories of ancient India as a cultural unit, despite its being torn by internecine wars through various periods of history, says:

> Yet our overall impression is that in no other part of the ancient world were the relations of man and man, and of man and the state, so fair and humane. In no other early civilization were slaves so few in number, and in no other ancient lawbook are their rights so well protected as in the *Arthashastra*. No other ancient law-giver proclaimed such noble ideals of fair play in battle as did Manu. ... To us the most striking feature of ancient Indian civilization is its humanity. ... the Indian character is neither lethargic nor unhappy ... her people enjoyed life, passionately delighting both in the things of the senses and the things of the spirit. The European student who concentrates on religious texts of a certain type may well gain the impression that ancient India was a land of 'life-negating' ascetics, imposing their gloomy and sterile ideas upon the trusting millions who were their lay followers. The fallacy of this impression is quite evident from the secular literature, sculpture and painting of the time.... India was a cheerful land, whose people, each finding a niche in a complex and slowly evolving social system, reached a higher level of kindliness and gentleness in their mutual relationships than any other nation of antiquity.

In all creative periods of Indian history including, of course the ancient, our people took a total and integrated view of life, never compartmentalizing it into mutually contrary parts. Ancient India's contributions in the fields of mathematics, acoustics, metallurgy, physiology and medicine were no less remarkable then those in philosophy, religion and art. It is on

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erudite scholars like you that the responsibility of the varied Oriental literature's hermeneutics and exegesis devolves and there can be no doubt that, given your profound learning and sense of dedication, this task will be carried out in a manner that will earn laurels from Orientalogists and Indologists both in India and abroad.

As the Patron of the Reception Committee I am painfully aware of our shortcomings and limitations in making your stay here as comfortable as we would have liked to. But counting on your generosity I will seek your indulgence in this matter. I can, however, assure you of our warmth of welcome and deep respect.

With these words I once again extend a most cordial welcome to you and wish you a happy and fruitful stay here.

T.K.N. UNNITHAN
Vice-Chancellor
University of Rajasthan & Patron,
Local Committee & Reception Committee

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